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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 004133

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CENTCOM FOR CG CSTC-A. CG CJTF-82 POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PHUM AF

SUBJECT: KARZAI BAITS HIS EMERGING POLITICAL OPPOSITION

REF: A. A) KABUL 3774
 1B. B) KABUL 1246
 1C. C) KABUL 1606

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4
(B) and (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Karzai recently fired several public salvos at his emerging political opposition, the Northern Alliance-backed United Front. He complained that his government's efforts to bring alleged human rights abusers to justice are being stymied by regionally powerful former warlords, who constitute the United Front's leadership. In a separate public statement, he implied the United Front is receiving financial support from foreign governments. Karzai may be unwise to antagonize the United Front, which is successfully positioning itself as the protector of ethnic minorities' interests against a resurgent predominantly Pashtun Taliban. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Repeating an assertion he first made last April, Karzai implied at a December press conference that the United Front (Ref A), the loose political party founded this year by key leaders of the Northern Alliance, is funded by "foreign sources." Karzai is likely attempting to play to gathering popular concern about foreign (Iranian, Russian, and Pakistani) meddling in Afghanistan. Senior Adviser to the President "Engineer" Ibrahim told the DCM December 15 that President Karzai is "very worried" about Iran's efforts to increase its influence in Afghanistan's nascent political parties. While the United Front typically denies it receives foreign money, the party's responses to our queries have recently become more nuanced. New United Front Spokesman Sangcharaki told us December 10: "Everyone in Afghanistan receives foreign money." Sangcharaki noted that the United Front leadership had rejected an internal proposal to open an office in Moscow.

13. (C) Speaking at a December 8 rally commemorating the 60th anniversary of International Human Rights Day, Karzai complained he had had to rein in the implementation of a three-year peace, reconciliation and justice plan to avoid provoking a violent backlash from past human rights violators who have retained positions of power (Comment: Former Northern Alliance warlords). In front of a crowd of 200 human rights activists and alleged victims of war crimes, Karzai went on to say "there are tyrants in our land... we

must move with lots of caution so as to... not cause more human rights violations." When queried directly by a rally participant as to why he had not moved against human rights abusers within the government, Karzai replied: "Because the power to implement (programs against human rights violators) does not exist in the government... there are places where the government can't reach." On December 15, Engineer Ibrahim told the DCM that Karzai's December 8 statement, though emotional, was "something that he wanted the people to hear." Ibrahim contended that the average Afghan had reacted positively. He did concede, however, that Karzai had managed to antagonize the United Front.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Karzai's goading of the United Front over human rights accountability may indeed play well with the many Afghans who recall the chaos of the post-Soviet warlord period. He may hope that, by harping on Iran's relationship with the United Front, established during the anti-Soviet jihad when Tehran supported the Northern Alliance, he can attenuate our relationship with his emerging political opposition. Nevertheless, by baiting the United Front, he jeopardizes his claim to being a unifying national figure, above partisan politics and ethnic allegiance. He also risks antagonizing a surprisingly ascendant political newcomer, which is successfully positioning itself as the protector of ethnic minorities' interests against a resurgent and predominantly Pashtun Taliban.

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